

## Influence of Principals' Autocratic Leadership Style on Teachers' Professional Commitment in Public Secondary Schools in Kericho Sub-County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** This study sought to establish the influence of principal's leadership styles on teachers' professional commitment in Kericho Sub-county, Kenya. Specifically the study was to establish the influence of Principals' Autocratic Leadership style on Teachers' Professional Commitment in public secondary schools in Kericho Sub-county. This research was informed by the situational leadership theory and descriptive research design was adopted to guide the study. The sub-county has 31 public secondary schools. In the 31 schools there are a total of 31 principals, 155 Heads of Departments and 400 Teachers. All the 31 principals were selected to participate in the study because the sub county has recorded a decline in KCSE performance in the last two years. Five (5) HODS' in charge of academics from each school were purposively selected because of their special complementary roles in the leadership and management of schools. Simple random sampling was used to select five subject teachers in each school, one from each academic department to participate in the study; also 3 sub county quality assurance and standards officers' were selected. Therefore a total of 344 respondents comprising of 31 principals, 155 HOD's, 155 subject teachers and 3 SCQASOs constituted the total sample size. Data was collected using questionnaires which were administered to principals, HODs and subject teachers while interview schedules were used to guide discussions with the SCQASOs. Validity of the instrument was determined by the supervisors, lecturers in the department of Education Kisii University. For reliability, a test re-test of the findings was calculated and a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.856 was obtained. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with aid of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program while the results from interviews were analyzed qualitatively and thematically. Results presented in Table 3 reveal that over half, 16 (58.8%) of the Principals were of the opinion that they do not use autocratic leadership style. However a significant proportion, 11 (41.2%) indicated that they used it. Results further show that three quarters of the HODs, 104 (76.5%) were also of the opinion that autocratic leadership was not being used, and only one quarter, 32 (23.5%) thought that autocratic leadership is used. The study recommended that principals should be in serviced on modern leadership styles such as situational and transformative. The researcher paid keen attention to research ethical issues and got the informed consent of the respondents and guarded against plagiarism and ensured confidentiality.

**Keywords:** Principals, Autocratic, Leadership, Professional, Commitment, schools, Kenya.

## INTRODUCTION

Education practitioners all over the world have recognized leadership as virtually important. The work of Armstrong [1] which was done in Britain postulated that for education institutions to embrace professional commitment, leadership styles have to be considered for the survival of the institutions. The research done in America by Beach and Reinhertz [2] found that search for leadership excellence has ignited much interest in

leaders from stakeholders of education. Schools as learning organizations deserve to be led well and effectively. Similarly, Oyetunyi [3], and Adeyemi [4] asserted that leadership matters because effective leaders make a difference in peoples' lives; they empower followers and teach them how to make meaning by taking appropriate actions that can facilitate change. According to Korkman [5] he states that the principal is the most important and influential

individual in the school, in particular, when their leadership styles are in support of teachers' professional commitment are enhanced.

Effective head teachers are able to transform a school into successful teaching and teachers communities [6]. Studies done by Blasé and Blasé [7] stated that the praise by the principal provides teachers with an increased efficacy, self-esteem and creates greater motivation. Other studies have shown that teacher's satisfaction with school leadership determines their involvement and commitment to duty [1]. This phenomenon occurs because teachers who see principals as facilitators, supporters and reinforces for the jointly determined school mission than as guiders, directors and leaders of their own personal agenda are far more likely to feel personally accountable for student learning. As teachers begin to feel better about them and what their collective mission is as a result of significant interaction with their principals they become more effective in the classroom. According to Barbuto [8] teachers are trained and are expected to prepare the following professional records; schemes of work, lesson plans, records of work and student progress reports, setting and marking of exams, and carry out actual teaching in the classroom, these will be realized when the principals are proactive.

The leader charts a way forward, Warren [9] alluded that the head teacher is the leader in the school, the pivot around which many aspects of the school revolve and the person in charge of every detail of the running of the school. The role of the principal in enhancing teacher commitment is a key component in promoting the ability of the teachers to function effectively by contributing significantly to the realization of the teaching and learning process in the school.

The future of any country is being shaped in the classrooms of the schools. This sentiment was echoed by Crawford, Gould and Scott [10] that successful implementation of the curriculum depends to a large extent on favorable leadership styles that boost teacher's job satisfaction, career commitment and intention to remain in the teaching profession. Mazzeo [11] says that when classroom instructions are weak in underperforming schools, significant responsibility rests with the principal. Teachers who work under poor leaders tend to become contented and their expectations are low, lesson plans become stale and the old adages

that "if you can't beat them join them" sink into collective mentalities. In view of the important role that effective leadership plays in the success of an organization, the role of the school leaders is very crucial. Though many factors come into play in as far as effectiveness of teachers is concerned, the leadership of the principal is one of these factors [10].

Professional effective commitment has been the expectation of most employers. In Uganda Nsubuga [12] observes that the ability of the principal to relate with the teachers in order to enable them act and improve the organizational performance is critical for the smooth and effective operation of a school. Despain [13] says that there is need for effective leadership to assist in the proper guidance of those we place in classroom. Leaders who empower as opposed to those who delegate build trust rather than demand loyalty. Denton [14] states that the moral purpose of school is to make a positive difference in the lives of the students by providing them with skills and knowledge that they need to lead productive and fulfilling lives. To do so requires that the school principal and other leaders treat their teachers well because ultimately teachers have the greatest influence on students.

According to According to Shushila [15], KESSP [16] secondary education in Kenya has been characterized by poor performance by some schools Kericho Sub-county included. This document states that one of the contributing factors is the head teacher's factor whereby some teachers have low pedagogical skills to deliver the curricular. This has contributed to internal inefficiencies where the leader fails to nurture employee motivation hence the desired results are not achieved. In order to mitigate against low levels of transition from primary to secondary levels of education, Free Day Secondary Education FDSE was introduced in 2008. The provision of Free Secondary Education (FSE ) funds is meant to go partly to tuition, vote head for the purchase of classroom teaching and learning materials to enhance students' academic achievement [17]. However, despite its importance in the process of the country's development, the expansion of quality education is far from being achieved in Kericho Sub-County. This is because the students' achievement has emerged as an issue of concern among parents, education officers and other stakeholders in education. The Table-1 below shows Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education performance in Kericho Sub-county for the last four years;

**Table-1: K. C.S. E performance in Kericho Sub-county:2010 – 2013**

YEAR	ENTRY	M/S	GRADE	DEVIATION
2013	2311	6.0531	C	-0.0689
2012	1977	6.1120	C	-0.0807
2011	2055	6.2031	C	+0.1583
2010	1971	6.0448	C	+0.5243

(Source, MOE, Kericho Sub-county (2014))

According to the MOE [18], Kericho Sub-county) it is abundantly clear that the observed falling standards in education in Kericho Sub-county seem to indicate that all is not well with the school leadership provided by head teachers. If this is not checked, the poor performance will jeopardize Kenya's bid to attain vision 2030; and the financial resources invested in the education sub-sector in the form of FSE funds will go to waste.

According to Waweru [19] and Ziglar [20] the most important human resource in any educational institution that enables it to achieve its core mission is the teacher. One area that needs empirical data is the influence that principal's leadership styles have on teacher's commitment to their professional work. This is because teachers' commitment has been identified as one of the most critical factors for the future success of education and schools [17]. Teacher commitment is closely connected to teachers work performance and their ability to innovate and to integrate new ideas into their own practice. Absenteeism and staff turnover, however, has an important influence on students' academic achievement and their attitude towards school [21].

#### **Statement of the Problem**

In Kenya, the performance of students in Secondary school examination has emerged as an issue of concern amongst parents and other stakeholders. Despite the government's effort to mitigate against low levels of transition from Primary to Secondary levels by introducing FSE funds for the purchase of teaching and learning materials, the expansion of quality education is far from being achieved. In Kericho sub-county, the KCSE Sub-county mean score has virtually remained at Grade C, out of a possible mean of A. In the year 2012 and 2013, the Sub-county recorded a decline in KCSE performance [18], Kericho Sub-county). Principals are expected to develop services which would increase teacher commitment, interest, motivation and self-fulfillment and make teachers feel secure and confident about themselves as professionals so that they can effectively deliver in their work. The fact that commitment is important for the realization of organizational and professional goals, especially in the teaching profession is an area of interest for investigation by this study. Hence it is important to identify committed teachers as well as to understand the extent to which principals leadership styles stimulates and sustain teachers commitment to their professional work in Kericho sub-county.

#### **Authoritarian/Autocratic leadership Style and Teachers' Professional Commitment**

In authoritarian/autocratic leadership style according to Armstrong [1], the focus of power is with the leader and all interactions within the group move towards the leader [22]. Similarly, German [23] says that autocratic leaders are classic 'do as I say types'.

Autocratic leaders tell people what to do and issue orders that they expect to be obeyed, hence has been deemed to be in line with professional commitment. It is said that autocratic leaders can damage an organization irreparably as they force their followers to execute strategies in a very narrow way or based upon a subjective idea of what success looks like. The leader here retains a much powerful and decision making authority as possible. The work of Murray [24] asserted that leader does not consult employees nor are they allowed to give any input. Employees are expected to obey orders without receiving any explanations and consequently show their professional commitment to the institution. Larferla [25] says this about the authoritarian managers: they are typically highly ambitious, egocentric individual, fears failure and is driven by controlling events and using others they are often opinionated and insensitive to others therefore have little professional commitment.

Research by Rugh and Bossert [26] describes the autocratic leadership style as a style where the leader retains most authority for him/her and makes decision with a view to ensuring that the rest implement it. He/she is not bothered by the attitude of the staff towards a decision. He/she is concerned about getting the tasks done. Autocratic leaders are generally disliked, as there is no scope of initiative, from the followers. The leader does not have confidence in his subordinates. As a result they are monitored at all times and he or she focuses on followers' mistakes rather than what they did well. According to Adeyemo [27] and Kadzamura [28], they admit that in autocratic leadership style employee-leader interaction is limited and is characterized with fear and mistrust hence professional commitment less emphasized. The leader rarely praises, rather he / she criticizes a lot, leading followers loss of confidence in him / her and become less committed to their work. Some studies say that organizations with many autocratic leaders have higher turnover and absenteeism than other organizations. Consequently, this affects performance and operations. These studies say that autocratic Leaders: rely on threats and punishment to influence employees, (<http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership>).

However these studies note that this leadership style may be useful when there are new untrained employees who do not know which tasks to perform or which procedures to follow, like new teachers joining the profession. Cherry states that this leadership is best applied where there is little time for group decision making (<http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership>).

The studies by Ojera and Yambo [29] and Ziglar [20] asserted that principals who subscribes to authoritarian style of leadership determines school policy alone and assigns duties to students and staff without consulting them. Directives are issued and must be carried out without question and in the prescribed

manner [24]. The principal does not feel accountable to anyone and hence acts independently. Although this style leads to low morale among students and the staff and may cause negative reactions, the principal has a great sense of self-confidence, a clear vision of what needs to be done and manipulative skills to achieve the desired outcome. The principal feels safe because he/she does not need to solve problems with groups of people.

Consequently, Yamboet *et al.*, [21] postulated that the leadership of the principal is determined by the way they relate to their members of staff, for example the principal as a leader in the school is expected to give direction or make decisions which must be followed by all those who work under him/her. He/she leads and the members of staff follow. This official leadership is a shared one. The principals on one hand are expected to give proper guidance to the team/staff; while on the other hand, they must expect good quality work from their members of staff. If the principals as leaders in schools lack the initiative and originality to give the proper guidance, the organization cannot be expected to achieve its goals. Similarly, Mumbi [30] added that some of the staff lacks sense of duty, the school was certainly fails to achieve its aims. Innovative ideas on the part of the principal, compiled

with devotion to duty by the members of staff, was given an organization the success needed [31].

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design, which according to Enanoria [32] describes as a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) individuals for the purposes of describing the attributes of the larger population of which the individual are members. The target population for this study was 586 persons broken down as follows: 31 Principals from 31 secondary schools, 155 Heads of Departments from 5 departments and 400 subject teachers in Kericho Sub-county

Due to convenience all the principals were selected for this study. Purposive sampling was also used to select the HODs in charge of academic areas only hence other HODs were not included. In support of this, Kombo and Tromp [33] noted that purposive sampling was appropriate when the researcher targets a group of people with reliable information for study and are special in some way. In this study therefore, 5 academic HODs were selected purposively from 31 schools making a total 155. They included the heads of departments namely: Mathematics, languages, humanities, sciences, and applied/technical departments. Table-2 gives a summary of the respondents.

**Table-2: The Sample Size**

Source of the Sample	No. of Principals	No. of HOD's	No. of Teachers	Grand Total
Mixed Day School	13	65	65	143
Mixed Day/Boarding School	7	35	35	77
Boys School	5	25	25	55
Girls School	6	30	30	66
SCQASOs	-	-	-	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>344</b>

These HODs were very critical and key to the implementation of academic curriculum in schools which has a strong academic achievement of students in public secondary school Bloomberg and Volpe [34] suggest that a sample of 30% can be sufficient enough to represent the total population. Simple random sampling was therefore used to select one teacher from each department to participate in the study making a total of 155 subject teachers. In essence, therefore a total of 344 respondents comprising of 31 principals, 155 HOD's, 155 teachers and 3 SCQASOs constituted the sample size of the study.

The questionnaires and interview schedules were used and administered by the researcher. In considering the validity of the study, Orodho [35] opined that the content validity of the instrument can be determined by discussing the items in the instrument with the supervisors, lecturers, therefore it was determined by supervisors in the department of Education Kisii University. For reliability, a test re-test

of the findings was calculated and a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.856 was obtained, which, according to Kombo and Tromp [33] was considered reliable.

## FINDINGS

### Authoritarian/ Autocratic Leadership Style

Autocratic leadership style was measured using a total of 8 questionnaire items. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which principals engage in each role/ behaviour reflecting autocratic leadership style. Responses were elicited on a 5 point scale ranging from 1-strongly agree to 5-strongly disagree. Responses were further re-coded into a new variable namely 'Authoritarian leadership style' with codes 1 (previous codes 1 & 2) indicating that this style is used and code 2 (previous codes 3, 4 & 5) indicating that it is not used.

A contingency table was then used to show the opinion of the respondents (Principals, HODs and

Subject teachers) on whether or not autocratic style was used. The contingency table was used since as noted by Blaickie [36], relationships between combinations of nominal level and ordinal level variables are best understood with the use of contingency tables. Results presented in Table 3 reveal that over half, 16 (58.8%) of the Principals were of the opinion that they do not use autocratic leadership style. However a significant

proportion, 11 (41.2%) indicated that they used it. Results further show that three quarters of the HODs, 104 (76.5%) were also of the opinion that autocratic leadership was not being used, and only one quarter, 32 (23.5%) thought that autocratic leadership is used. Likewise, 89 (72.1%) of the subject teachers indicated that autocratic leadership was not being used, while only, 33(27.9%) indicated that it was being used.

**Table-3: Respondents Opinion on use of Authoritarian Leadership Style**

Teacher Category	Authoritarian Leadership Style		Total
	Used	Not Used	
Principal	11(41.2%)	16(58.8%)	27(100.0%)
HOD	32(23.5%)	104(76.5%)	136(100.0%)
Subject Teacher	33(27.9%)	89(72.1%)	122(100.0%)
Total	76(27.4%)	209(72.6%)	285(100.0%)

Source: Survey Data (2014)

These results tend to suggest that autocratic leadership style is hardly used by principals in Kericho Sub-county. However, some principals, albeit a small proportion practice this style.

## CONCLUSION

Although principals have at their disposal the four leadership styles, most of them apply the democratic style. Considering that performance levels in national exams continue to dwindle, it can then be concluded that whereas the democratic leadership style influences high levels of commitment among teachers towards their professional work, it alone cannot influence learner performance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Principals should be given needs based assessment in-service particularly on modern styles of leadership such as situational and transformative leadership styles which are more productive.

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